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January 28, 2014

Mr. Timothy D. Crowley
President
Northern Maine Community College
33 Edgemont Drive
Presque Isle, ME 04769

President's Office

JAN 31 2014

RECEIVED

Dear President Crowley:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 21, 2013, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by Northern Maine Community College and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by Northern Maine Community College be accepted;

that the institution submit a report by October 15, 2014 for consideration at the Commission's November 2014 meeting that gives emphasis to the College's progress in:

1. achieving its enrollment goals;
2. stabilizing and strengthening its financial condition, with attention to unrestricted net assets and discounting of tuition and fees;
3. reviewing its mission statement and developing a strategic plan that incorporates priorities from the Maine Community College System strategic plan;

that the College include with its October 2014 report a copy of its FY2014 audited financial statements and management letter;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2018 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2018 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. implementing its strategic plan;

2. engaging faculty in the assessment of student learning, including efforts to support student retention, and in initiatives to assure comparable learning and advising outcomes across different instructional modalities;
3. completing its review of credit requirements in programs that exceed 60 credit hours;
4. continuing to achieve its enrollment and financial goals.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The Commission commends Northern Maine Community College (NMCC) for a thorough interim report and for using the 2008 self-study and team review to guide its efforts to continuously improve the institution.

The Commission takes favorable note of the five-year program and institutional assessment plan NMCC has developed. The College's Assessment Committee led the academic curriculum mapping project to completion; this work was guided by established student learning outcomes at the course and program level. This initiative led to further curricular changes and consideration of additional assessment measures of student learning, and an analysis of NMCC's results from national assessment surveys resulted in a decision to reinstitute the freshman seminar course, College Success 103, and to conduct research of the course's effectiveness. We note with approval Northern Maine Community College's "shared commitment to academic quality" and the use of multiple measures of student learning, including national licensing examinations, state and national certifications, clinical rotation evaluations for health science students, and employer surveys from internships. We are gratified to learn that students are "pleased with their instructors and academic programming," as demonstrated by the 90% satisfaction rating achieved in NMCC's annual electronic Student Satisfaction Survey.

NMCC has enhanced the student support services offered through the redesigned Academic Success Center (ASC) with the inclusion of academic tutoring and career advising face-to-face and online; we are pleased to learn that students participating in the ASC services demonstrated an increase in GPA from 2.36 in 2007 to 2.87 in 2013. The College has increased its capacity in data transmission and wireless services and with assistance from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act federal grant, has engaged in significant energy conservation efforts that are related to its academic offerings in alternative energy technologies. Finally, we note with favor that NMCC's fund-raising, including the major gifts campaign, has contributed \$1.095 million to strategic initiatives and has strengthened relationships.

The items the institution is asked to report on October 15, 2014 are related to our standards on *Students*, *Financial Resources*, and *Planning and Evaluation*.

The Commission understands that enrollment at Northern Maine Community College has been declining over the past three years, with a 17.7% decline from 2011 to 2013. We are pleased to learn of NMCC's retention strategies for both on- and off- campus students, through student support services and courses such as the New Student Orientation sessions and freshman seminar provided on campus and online. We look forward to learning, through the report submitted in October 2014, of the College's success in achieving its goals for enrollment, consistent with our standard on *Students*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve and addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students (6.1).

The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (6.8).

The Commission appreciates NMCC's candid acknowledgment that it faces "serious financial challenges" with a reduction of state funding of \$500,000 and unrestricted net assets of negative \$284,000 in FY 2012. We also note that tuition and fees are discounted at high levels. We are pleased to learn of the College's success in offsetting the reduction in state appropriation with other forms of external funding, including federal grants and fundraising. Through the October 2014 report, we seek assurance of the College's continued success in enhancing its financial stability. We remind you of our standard on *Financial Resources*:

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or a historically narrow base of support (9.2).

As part of the October 2014 report, the College's audited financial statement for FY2014, along with the management letter, are requested as verification of the institution's financial position.

We understand that NMCC will begin its strategic planning effort during AY2014. This work will begin with a "critical review" of the College's mission statement and guiding principles and will incorporate the priorities of the strategic plan developed for the Maine Community College System (MCCS), particularly in the areas of enrollment, retention and professional development. The October 2014 report will enable the institution to provide evidence of its progress in revising its mission and developing its strategic plan. Our standards on *Mission and Purposes* and *Planning and Evaluation* are relevant here:

The institution periodically re-evaluates the content and pertinence of its mission and purposes, assessing their usefulness in providing overall direction in planning and resource allocation. The results of this evaluation are used to enhance institutional effectiveness (1.5).

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.3).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2018 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. In addition to the information included in all self-studies, we ask that the institution give emphasis, within the Spring 2018 self-study, to five matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, and *Financial Resources*.

First, the Spring 2018 comprehensive evaluation will afford Northern Maine Community College an opportunity to report on its continued success in implementing its strategic plan, as evidence of its "demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.4).

The Commission takes favorable note of NMCC's commitment to enhance the engagement of its faculty in the assessment of student learning, retention initiatives, and program review and to assure the comparability of outcomes across delivery modalities. We are gratified to learn NMCC has "experts on the faculty who can be of assistance to their colleagues" and note with favor the

participation of faculty in off- and on-campus professional development activities about assessment. We anticipate being apprised, in Spring 2018, of the College's success in engaging in "systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom" (4.48). Our standard on *The Academic Program* provides this additional guidance:

The institution offering programs and courses for abbreviated or concentrated time periods or via distance or correspondence learning demonstrates that students completing these programs or courses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies equivalent to those achieved in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods and modalities (4.39).

The institution's approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty (4.51).

The Commission appreciates the College's candid acknowledgment of the "constant credit creep" that some programs have experienced and the resulting impact on students' ability to complete their degrees in a timely manner. We understand MOC plans to conduct a review of degree credits and time-to-completion by July 1, 2014. The Spring 2018 comprehensive evaluation will afford the institution an opportunity to provide an update on the successful completion of this study. Our standard on *The Academic Program* is relevant here:

The evaluation of student learning or achievement and the award of credit are based upon clearly stated criteria that reflect learning objectives and are consistently and effectively applied. They are appropriate to the degree level at which they are applied (4.33).

Credit awards are consistent with Commission policy and the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning. The award of credit is based on policies developed and overseen by the faculty and academic administration. There is demonstrable academic content for all experiences for which credit is awarded, including study abroad, internships, independent study, and service learning. No credit toward graduation is awarded for pre-collegiate level or remedial work designed to prepare the student for collegiate study (4.34).

Finally, Northern Maine Community College is asked, in the Spring 2018 self-study to give emphasis to its continued success in enhancing its financial stability. The Commission recognizes that this matter does not lend itself to rapid resolution and will require the College's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the self-study, in keeping with our standard on *Financial Resources*, cited above.

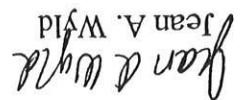
The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Northern Maine Community College and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Robert Clark. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Mr. Timothy D. Crowley
January 28, 2014
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,


Jean A. Wyld

JA W/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Robert Clark